

By responsibility sharing—identifying the recurrent thoughts and behaviors that upset them, working out concrete alternatives, and writing new scripts—Keith and Michelle learned to manage and, at times, rise above their conflicts. This effort required hard work, commitment, self-awareness, openness, and maturity. It didn't just happen. But as they began to make changes in service of their relationship and their more integrated selves, they elicited more positive responses from each other and bonded together more solidly.

I hope that you, too, will work to understand yourself and your partner better, to pool your accumulated wisdom, to develop compassion and forgiveness for each other's limitations and damaging early experiences, and to design a better future together, based on a deeper awareness of who you are and who you're struggling to become. In short, I hope you share responsibility for feeling more satisfied and loved at home.

Now let's turn our attention from the lessons of the past to the present, from understanding why the affair happened to learning how you can recover from it. The next chapter addresses the very concrete task of restoring trust.

## SIX

## Restoring Trust

Hearts are not had as a gift but hearts are earned  
By those that are not entirely beautiful.

—William Butler Yeats, "A Prayer for My Daughter"

Trust is not a gift. It must be earned, and not with verbal reassurances alone, but with specific changes in behavior. You, the unfaithful partner, need to demonstrate to your partner through bold, concrete actions that "I'm committed to you. You're safe with me." You, the hurt partner, need to open yourself to the possibility of trusting again, and reinforce your partner's efforts to win back your confidence. You can't punish forever, you can't be cold and distant forever, or your partner will give up trying to reconnect. You need to spell out exactly what your partner can do for you, and give this person a road map back into your life.

When I speak of trust, I'm referring, of course, to your belief that your partner will remain faithful to you. But there's another kind of trust that matters, too—the trust, essential to you both, that if you venture back into the relationship, your partner will address your grievances and not leave you regretting your decision to recommit.

The first part of this chapter teaches you to change your behavior in ways that rekindle both kinds of trust. The second part challenges some common assumptions that sabotage your ability to act in trust-enhancing ways. By taking both steps—changing your behavior, and overcoming your resistance to change—you greatly increase your chances of getting the affair behind you and rebuilding a loving relationship.

### PART ONE: CHANGING YOUR BEHAVIOR

If you're going to change your behavior toward your partner, you may have to act at times *as if* you feel more loving, secure, or forgiving than you really do. If you wait until your affection returns, you may very well outwait the relationship. Give in to your doubts and fears, and your relationship may die. Change your behavior first—act in a more conscious and positive way—and loving feelings may follow.

In the past you may have come home at night, grunted hello, silently rifled through the mail, and dashed upstairs to wash up or return a few calls. You weren't necessarily shutting out your partner—you were perhaps only trying to depressurize after a long day's work. But now, in the wake of the affair, and in service of a more nurturing relationship, you need to do more. Like the choreographer of an intimate dance, you need to think through exactly what you'd like to see happen between the two of you, and act in ways that will make it happen. You need to reveal what's important to you and retrain yourself to treat your partner in ways that say, "I like you. You matter to me." If this sounds like a lot of work, it is; but it probably demands a lot less time and effort than you squander on fighting.

There are many things you both can do to restore trust. I find it helpful to divide them into two categories—what I call *low-cost behaviors* and *high-cost behaviors*.<sup>1</sup> As you might expect, the low-cost behaviors are generally easier to produce because they demand less of you emotionally. High-cost behaviors require a much greater sacrifice.

### Low-Cost Behaviors

Below is a list of some low-cost, trust-building behaviors that you may want from your partner. Some of them your partner may already do, others your partner may rarely or never do. Using these behaviors as a starting point, make your own list of what you want from your partner, and write it in the center column of the Trust-Building Chart on page 163.<sup>2</sup>

You, the hurt partner, need to request behaviors that make you feel more cared for, appreciated, and secure ("Tell me when you run into the affair-person"; "Show me affection at times without making it sexual"). You, the unfaithful partner, need to request behaviors that reassure you that your efforts to restore trust are paying off ("Tell me when you feel more optimistic about our future together") and that your partner is trying to address your dissatisfaction at home ("Show understanding of my need to spend some time alone"; "Tell me when you like the way I interact with the kids"). Be sure to address all aspects of your relationship—communication, free time, finances, sex, the children and other family members, personal habits, and so on. Many of the behaviors you request, your partner may also ask of you.

Here's a sample list:

- "Provide me with an accurate itinerary when you travel."
- "Limit your overnight travel."
- "Tell me when you run into or hear from the affair-person."
- "Tell me how you find me attractive."



- "Show me what pleases you sexually."
- "Tell me when you feel proud of me, and why."
- "Call or text me during the day."
- "Tell me how you feel—share your intimate thoughts with me."
- "Tell me when you feel happy or more optimistic about our future together."
- "Come home from work in time to have dinner with the family."
- "Spend more time in foreplay—kissing and touching."
- "Tell me what upset you during the day."
- "Tell me what pleased you during the day."
- "Focus on what I'm saying, and don't be distracted when we talk."
- "Tell me when you feel I've let you down."
- "Work on letting your anger go and getting back on track with me."
- "Take a massage class with me."
- "Show me affection outside the bedroom."
- "Buy new furniture for the bedroom (where you brought the affair-person)."
- "Talk to me directly about your feelings. Don't clam up and withdraw or attack me. Don't use humor or sarcasm to make your point."
- "Ask me how I feel; don't interpret my behavior or assume you know how I feel."
- "Hold me and show understanding when I'm upset; don't give up on me."
- "Make some fun, new weekend plans for us."
- "When you speak to me in a demeaning or contemptuous tone, apologize as soon as possible."
- "Tell me when you feel insecure about us, rather than assume I'm deceiving you."
- "Read and discuss a self-help book with me about making our relationship better." (Among those I'd recommend are *Try to See It My Way* by B. Janet Hibbs,<sup>3</sup> *Feeling Good To-*

*gether* by David D. Burns,<sup>4</sup> and *Getting the Love You Want* by Harville Hendrix.<sup>5</sup>

In putting together your own wish lists, be sure to:

1. *Be as positive and specific as possible.* Make your list more than a litany of complaints. If you indicate only what your partner does that irritates or hurts you, you're not communicating what you want and are bound to throw your partner on the defensive. Concentrate on what you want your partner to *do*—on those specific, observable behaviors that will bring you closer together. For example, instead of requesting something general or negative ("Don't be so controlling"), tell your partner in *positive* and *specific terms* exactly what you need ("Go along with my agenda at times, even if it's not exactly what you want to do, and be gracious about it").
2. *Respect your partner's requests as being important to him or her.* Each list is extremely personal; what comforts you (for example, "Call me during the day and show interest in how I'm feeling") may only annoy your partner. The changes you're asked to make may seem frivolous or gratuitous to you, but you need to respect that they matter to your partner.
3. *Respond to different requests on different days.* Vary the requests you choose to fulfill. Don't repeat one or two and ignore the rest. Remember: The small, caring things you do for each other from day to day make a tremendous difference in the way you feel toward each other. So do their absence.
4. *Put your lists in a visible place.* Display them on the home page of your computer, inside a closet door, or in some other accessible spot so that you're constantly reminded to satisfy each other's requests.
5. *Record the date on your Trust-Building Chart each time your partner satisfies one of your requests.* It may sound compulsive, but by acknowledging your partner's conscious efforts to please you, you reinforce them and increase the likelihood that they'll continue. You also may correct a cognitive error in yourself known as *selective negative focus*, in which you dwell on

the negative and screen out whatever contradicts it. It's normal for you to recall the bad times more vividly than the good, to sum up the day more in terms of moments that disappoint you or fire up your mistrust, than in terms of those that reinforce a feeling of well-being. By recording the dates of your partner's actions, however, you remind yourself that change is possible. Should you despair of moving forward, and believe, "I'm the only one who's trying," or "Nothing I do matters anyway—I'll never be forgiven," you have only to refer back to the dates on the chart for a reality check that should make you feel more appreciative, hopeful, and patient.

6. *Do what your partner requests, whether or not you feel hopeful about the future.* There may be times when reconnecting seems impossible—when you look at your partner and wonder, “Can you really change enough for me to love you, or for me to feel loved by you, again? Do you really care about me, or are you just going through the motions?”

Try to hang on at these moments. Your doubts may be fed by your own fears and insecurities. They may also be triggered by a partner as scared and hurt as you are, who is ignoring your needs temporarily to test your resolve and gauge the depth of your commitment. If you stop trying because your partner has, you give that person a chance to blame you for the breakdown of the relationship. If you continue to fulfill your partner's requests and refuse to get derailed, your partner will be forced to confront not you, but his or her own resistance.

7. *Add new requests to your list and discuss them as you learn more about yourself and about what you need to feel secure and loved.* When Martha's husband took her to an office party, he abandoned her to the crudités and hardly spoke to her all night. The next day she added the following request to her list: "When we go out together, touch base with me frequently, put your arm around me or hold my hand if you're feeling loving toward me, and make me feel you're proud of me by introducing me to your friends."

### Trust-Building Chart

[illegible]



As you interact in more conscious ways, you'll recognize additional behaviors that please or upset you. Add them to your list. The more information you can give your partner about what matters to you, the more you enable your partner to make you happy.

Let's look briefly at how one cohabitating couple, Arlene and Tim, used low-cost behaviors to restore trust.

Arlene wanted to feel more loved, and Tim wanted to feel more accepted for who he was. Arlene had slept with a colleague at work—not to replace Tim, she insisted, but because she felt lonely and neglected. Her list of low-cost behaviors was relatively short, but it got to the heart of what Tim could do to make her feel more cherished:

- "Smile at me and give me your full attention when you talk to me."
- "Speak to me in a warmer, more loving tone of voice."
- "Invite me to join you in fun activities; make plans in advance so I can look forward to them."
- "Take my hand when we walk."
- "Tell me when you feel love for me."
- "Tell me why you love me."

Tim's list, also short, voiced his need to feel that he could be himself, that "there was room in our relationship for me to be me":

- "If I'm quiet, ask me what's on my mind; don't assume I'm withdrawing from you or feeling critical."
- "Show understanding of my need to work a few hours at the office on weekends."
- "Realize that I talk more slowly than you, and don't interrupt me. Paraphrase my point of view; help me to open up."
- "Show more interest in what interests me—politics, for example."

- "Do more to share the costs and the work of keeping up our condo."

Nothing that Tim and Arlene put on their lists, or that you and your partner put on yours, should be taken as a demand or a requirement—so don't be afraid to write down everything that matters to you. Talk over what you're asking for and what you expect the positive impact to be. Once you're clear about your partner's requests, try to adhere to as many of them as you can and to act in new ways that you know will be supportive. I encourage you to see yourself at a crossroads, deciding which route to take by asking, "How would I normally handle this situation? What's my usual pattern? What response does it evoke in my partner? What would happen if I behaved differently?"

When Arlene felt her old urge to pounce on Tim at a restaurant for being so silent and self-absorbed, she stopped and asked herself, "What on Tim's list can I do to make him feel more accepted? Am I taking his behavior too personally?" Instead of berating him, she took his hand and said, "You seem lost in your own thoughts. What's going on?" Appreciating her efforts to reach out to him, he was able to tell her that he had been watching the couple next to them and thinking how bad he was at making conversation. Remembering her list of requests, he revealed his true feelings—that in spite of his silence he was feeling close to her. He then took her hand and kissed it.

Low-cost behaviors can inject fresh blood into your relationship at a time when you've been hemorrhaging. This is likely to create a dramatic surge in trust, and allow you to feel more hopeful and connected. Unfortunately, the transfusion is seldom enough to revitalize a damaged relationship, and the effects often fade within weeks. While you both should continue with these low-cost behaviors—you need them to jumpstart your relationship and get you to believe in each other again—you, the unfaithful partner, must be prepared for some greater sacrifices.

### High-Cost Behaviors

As we saw in Chapter 1, the hurt partner shoulders a disproportionate share of the burden of recovery once the affair is revealed. While you both may struggle to make sense of what happened, it's you, the hurt partner, who almost always has a heavier emotional load to carry. It's your job to control your obsessions, calm the rage inside you that continues to scream out at the pain of rejection, restore your lost sense of self, act in ways that are attractive to your partner, risk being vulnerable and intimate again, and forgive yourself as well as your mate.

In contrast, you, the unfaithful partner, typically want to be done with it: You've confessed, you've pledged fidelity—why, you wonder, shouldn't you be trusted now? More often than not, you feel relieved, cleansed, ready to move on. You may even feel emotionally strengthened by an affair that has reaffirmed your desirability. In short, it's in your interest to trust and forgive, while it's in your partner's interest *not* to trust and forgive, at least not too quickly.

Both of you need to exchange low-cost behaviors as a way of correcting and sharing responsibility for what went wrong in your relationship. High-cost behaviors are the responsibility of you, the unfaithful partner, alone. They're the sacrificial gifts, the penances, that you must consider making to redress the injury you've caused and rebalance the scale. It's not enough for you to say, "Trust me, honey—I'm here to stay." You have to back your claim with dramatic gestures that are "expensive"—in other words, that require real sacrifice and will probably make you feel uncomfortable and vulnerable.

These high-cost behaviors shouldn't be arbitrary or punitive. They're specific actions that your partner requests of you, or that you commit to on your own, which give your partner reason to believe that you won't stray again and that investing in the relationship isn't a foolish waste of time.

Here are some examples:

- "Don't contact or associate with the affair-person's circle of friends or relatives."
- "Quit the club or association to which the affair-person belongs."
- "Transfer some of your assets into my name."
- "Put some of your money into a joint account."
- "Assign your secretary [the affair-person] to someone else, and if that's not possible, find another job."
- "Go on a romantic vacation with me."
- "Pay for me to complete my college education."
- "Show me your monthly bank statements, credit card statements, and phone bills."
- "Get into therapy and discuss starting a family with me."
- "Do whatever it takes to give up drugs or alcohol (enter an inpatient detox facility or regularly attend AA meetings)."
- "Move to another town with me."
- "Explore in therapy the effects of your father's/mother's infidelity on you."
- "Get into couples therapy with me and work to figure out exactly what the affair says about you, about me, and about us."
- "Answer all my questions about the affair-person in front of a therapist, so I'm more certain that you're telling the truth."

The difference between high- and low-cost behaviors is totally subjective, and varies from one person to the next. What one of you finds easy to comply with ("Register the car in my name"), another may find threatening and compromising. How critical a particular behavior is for you depends in part on the circumstances of the affair. If your wife financed her weekly rendezvous from a personal account, you may find it essential to have access to her bank and credit card statements. If your husband was sleeping with his secretary, you may require him to change jobs, or secretaries.

It can be particularly stressful for you, the unfaithful part-



ner, to negotiate high-cost behaviors that threaten your sense of self, as defined by your income or career. Compromise is possible, however, as the following case illustrates.

Roy, an established attorney in a small suburban community, had a history of one-night stands, usually with women he picked up in bars. One night his wife, Barbara, came home early and found him in bed with his latest find. When she shared her humiliation with a friend, she discovered that everyone in town already knew about her husband's womanizing—neighbors, the owner of her favorite restaurant, even her son. "I was so publicly disgraced, I couldn't imagine functioning in this community anymore," she told me.

Roy seemed sincere about controlling his sexual addiction and entered individual and couples therapy to prove it. But Barbara was nervous about the future. A proud woman nearing retirement age, she felt incapable of creating enough financial security for herself to maintain a fraction of her current lifestyle. "What if Roy not only cheats on me again but leaves me?" she asked. "What if I feel I have to leave him? How would I support myself?"

Barbara considered cutting her losses, ending the thirty-six-year-old marriage, and going after the best settlement the courts would grant her. Both partners clearly wanted to stay together, however, so I encouraged Barbara to voice her anxieties directly to Roy, and to construct with him a list of high-cost behaviors that would directly address those anxieties. What she asked for was this:

- "I'd like him to continue in therapy."
- "I'd like him to transfer 75 percent of his assets to my name." (She needed this display of commitment to allay her financial concerns and convince herself that he was serious about staying faithful.)
- "I'd like him to seek a new job in another community, and resettle there with me." (She felt publicly exposed in her hometown.)

Roy was willing to stay in therapy and get help with what he, too, saw as a problem. He also felt comfortable transferring most of his assets into Barbara's name to demonstrate his commitment in a tangible way. They went to an attorney and worked out an agreement.

The third request—relocating—was the one he had serious trouble with. He found it outrageous, even manipulative. He was established professionally, and moving meant a loss of status and income. He saw, however, that he risked losing Barbara if he gave her too little too late, and that she was asking him to agree to a fresh start not to hurt him but to help her believe in him again and overcome her sense of shame.

In the end, he pursued a transfer to another town. Fortunately, by the time it was granted, Barbara felt reintegrated into the community and didn't want to leave. Roy's willingness to forfeit what mattered so much to him—to do what it took to help her trust him again—was sufficient for her. His high-cost behavior didn't by itself restore trust, but, combined with other behaviors, it served as a bridge to recovery.

#### *Stalemate: When You Can't Agree on High-Cost Behaviors*

Sometimes you won't be able to agree on high-cost behaviors because of the meanings you attach to them—meanings that have as much to do with early childhood wounds as with your current conflict. One of you, for example, may insist on being made to feel number one all the time because you were ignored in your youth, while the other may refuse to make anyone feel special because of a childhood spent catering to a parent's needs. What one of you demands, the other may categorically refuse to do.

Should you reach an impasse, you need to step back and examine how your personal issues—the ones we discussed in Chapter 5—may be getting in the way of a meaningful compromise. That's what Ed and Miriam did.

Ed's affair with his secretary lasted nearly as long as his four-year marriage. When Miriam found out, he promised to be

faithful, but Miriam found it impossible to trust him as long as he and the secretary worked together.

Ed tried low-cost behaviors first. He left work by six, as his wife requested (when he was having the affair, he often stayed late); he assigned himself another secretary; he called his wife during the day to let her know where he'd be; and he frequently invited her to meet him in the office for lunch.

These behaviors didn't go far enough for Miriam, however. She needed something more persuasive. If he couldn't work in a different office from the affair-person, then, she felt, he should quit and find another job. Ed panicked. He had just been offered stock in the company and had a solid future there. Miriam was pregnant. This was not the time for reading help-wanted ads.

They were at a stalemate. Ed saw his wife as emotionally overwrought and unforgiving. Her high-cost requests were, to him, mean and senseless, meant only to control him. "Even if I meet all her demands, she'll never trust me again, so what's the point?" he told me. Both of them refused to budge.

To move them forward, I encouraged them to ferret out those personal issues that led them to hold such uncompromising positions. For Ed, this meant confronting his deep-rooted sense of inadequacy, stemming from a lifelong rivalry with his high-achieving siblings. His lack of self-confidence made him doubt his worth in the marketplace. For Miriam, it meant confronting a lifelong sense of violation. "Not only did my stepfather molest me," she told me, "but my mother knew and chose to stay with him. She chose him over me. What Ed did was bring back all the bitterness and grief. I see I'm looking to him to make sacrifices not just so I can trust him again, but so I can erase all those years of suffering."

These personal reflections helped them soften their positions. As this book went to press, Ed was looking for a new job and working to step out from under the shadow of his siblings. Miriam, appreciating the scope of his sacrifice, was becoming

more patient and trusting, and learning not to hold him responsible for everything bad that had happened in her life.

As with Ed and Miriam, you need to explore why certain sacrifices seem essential, and others impossible to fulfill. You also need to appreciate what they mean to your partner, and try to work out a compromise.

## PART TWO: OVERCOMING YOUR RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

As much as you may like the idea of using the trust-building exercises, I guarantee that you'll resist carrying some of them out. It's not that you're a bad person or that you don't want the relationship to improve, but that your deeply wired assumptions are likely to get in the way. Some of them may stop you from communicating your needs, others may stop you from satisfying your partner's needs. Still others may force you to discount whatever it is your partner tries to do for you. Let's look at nine common cognitive blocks:

1. "I don't have the right to ask my partner to change for me."
2. "If I say what I need, I'll just hurt or anger my partner, and create more conflict. It's better to keep my dissatisfaction to myself."
3. "My partner should intuit what I need. I shouldn't have to spell it out."
4. "I can't ask for love. If I have to, I don't want it."
5. "If my partner does what I ask, not spontaneously but only out of a conscious desire to win my trust, it doesn't count."
6. "My partner is responding to my requests only to deceive me and get me back. As soon as I start trusting again, we'll be back where we started."
7. "I shouldn't have to acknowledge my partner's trust-building behaviors."



8. "My partner hurt me/let me down and should change first."
9. "I can't and shouldn't act in trust-building ways when I'm so angry."

**Cognitive Block #1: "I don't have the right to ask my partner to change for me."**

This common attitude is dysfunctional because it silences you and cuts you off from your partner and yourself. It robs you of the chance to find out whether your partner is willing to respond to your grievances, and it robs your partner of the chance to make good.

Look inside yourself and ask, "Why do I find it so hard to request something from my partner, something just for me? Where did this lack of entitlement come from? Did a parent ignore or punish me when I tried to speak up? Did I grow up in a household where I learned not to burden others with my needs? Was one of my parents a model of self-effacement?"

I encourage you to act against this cognitive block and prepare a full list of changes you want your partner to make for you. You may discover that you have been trapped in your own head, have imposed an isolation on yourself that's unnecessary, and have denied a basic need to be cared for, for much too long.

**Cognitive Block #2: "If I say what I need, I'll just hurt or anger my partner, and create more conflict. It's better to keep my dissatisfaction to myself."**

The wish to keep peace at any cost is a common but dangerous obstacle to restoring trust and intimacy. It was Teri's attitude after her affair. She needed her alcoholic husband to know that she had strayed because he was unavailable to her, and that she'd never be satisfied at home until he addressed his addiction. But she kept silent and hoped the whole mess would go away.

Over time, Teri came to see that a request for change was not an attack on her partner's character but a gift in service of

their relationship. She traced her fear of confrontation to her father, who taught her to obey his authority and punished her for speaking up. "I need to be honest with you in a way I was never allowed to be with my father," she told her spouse. "I'm afraid of alienating you, but I've pushed you even further away by cheating on you and not telling you straight out how I need you to change."

Talking so openly drained the process of its terror and taught Teri that unless a person risks conflict, there can be no closeness, no resolution.

**Cognitive Block #3: "My partner should intuit what I need. I shouldn't have to spell it out."**

This assumption is a recipe for misunderstanding and disappointment, as it was for a patient named Helen. When her husband, Richard, returned to her after a month-long fling, he was not wearing his wedding ring. The meaning to Helen was clear: He was still ambivalent about recommitting and wanted women to think he was still available. Her pattern, however, was to say nothing and privately burn. "He knows it's important to me," she told me. "Why should I have to bring it up?"

I encouraged Helen to add her request that he wear the ring to her list of low-cost behaviors, and to discuss it with him. What she discovered was that he had lost the ring and was afraid to let her know. Once the issue was out in the open, he bought a new one and was happy to wear it.

It's important to realize that your partner is not a mind-reader; that it's your job to articulate your needs, and that if your partner doesn't always anticipate them, it doesn't mean your partner doesn't love you.

**Cognitive Block #4: "I can't ask for love. If I have to, I don't want it."**

It's relatively easy to ask your partner to take out the garbage or call during the day; it's much harder to ask your partner to say, "I love you."

Most people dismiss expressions of love when they're given on demand and feel demeaned when they have to ask for them. But if it's important for you to be told you're loved, be sure to add this request to your list. Just make clear that you want to hear loving words only when they're sincere. You need to free yourself to speak up for whatever you need most.

**Cognitive Block #5: "If my partner does what I ask, not spontaneously but only out of a conscious desire to win my trust, it doesn't count."**

Some of you may devalue your partner's efforts to restore trust when they're not gratuitous expressions of love but deliberate gestures meant to rebuild the relationship. "I want my partner to behave naturally, and do things that spring from the heart," you say. The problem with this attitude is that, the harder your partner tries, the less sincere it will seem to you. By valuing *feelings* of love more than *actions* that convey love, you limit your partner's ability to reach out to you in the only way that may be possible at this time.

I'm reminded of an incident with my son Max when he was six. We had gone skiing in Vermont for the day. As I watched him whiz by, I overheard a group of adults marveling at his performance, and felt a surge of love for him. Turn the clock ahead eight hours, and we were pulling into the garage at home, exhausted and soggy. The thought of waking Max from a deep sleep, dragging him upstairs, and putting him to bed was almost more than I could bear, and I considered for a moment letting him spend the night in the car. Frankly, I felt more fatigue than love. But what I did was force myself to act *as if* I felt love, and patiently got one very cranky child into bed. Looking back, I realize that this self-instructed kind of love was deeper, stronger, than the spontaneous feelings that had swept over me earlier that day. Those feelings were real but cheap; they asked nothing of me.

It's when we coach ourselves to act in loving ways in service of our relationship (even if we don't happen to feel very loving

at the moment) that we pass the true test of love. It requires more to act loving when we don't feel that way. It asks us to go deep inside ourselves, to tug at our resources, and to deliver what truly matters to us. Acting out of a sense of enduring attachment and commitment to another human being can be very loving indeed.

**Cognitive Block #6: "My partner is responding to my requests only to deceive me and get me back. As soon as I start trusting again, we'll be back where we started."**

Some of you are likely to doubt the sincerity of your partner's efforts, and dismiss them as exercises in deception. "My partner's trying to please me only to lure me back," one unfaithful partner told me. "She needs my income." "My partner's changing only so I'll take him back," a hurt partner explained. "He's afraid the divorce settlement will strip him of his assets. He'll change now, but not for long." The problem with this attitude is that it makes growth and recovery impossible. If you don't give your partner an opportunity to change, to earn back trust, how will you ever know what's possible? If you always read duplicity in your partner's high- or low-cost behaviors, how can you ever be comforted or reassured by them? The idea is not to get rid of your skepticism—that would be unrealistic—but to suspend it long enough to give the healing process a chance to take hold.

**Cognitive Block #7: "I shouldn't have to acknowledge my partner's trust-building behaviors."**

Some of you may resist recording your partner's behaviors on the Trust-Building Chart, on the grounds that mature adults shouldn't need to be coddled. "Why should I acknowledge it every time my wife does something nice for me?" a hurt partner named Tom asked me. "Why should I pat her on the back for trying to clean up her own mess? She's not a child. If she chooses to act in a loving way, she should do it without expecting me to tell her how great she is."



What Tom, like you, may come to accept is that everyone needs praise and recognition; everyone needs to know that labors of love are noticed and make a difference. If you refuse to acknowledge what your partner is doing in service of the relationship, you discourage the very behaviors you want to produce.

**Cognitive Block #8: "My partner hurt me/let me down and should change first."**

This you-change-first attitude destroys the natural flow of a mature relationship, in which one partner usually does more for the other at any given moment, without keeping score. It also reduces you to petty, vengeful, highly competitive behaviors that destroy your ability to enter into the trust and caring exercises. Refusing to take the initiative may satisfy your sense of indignation, but it will do nothing to heal your wounds. I encourage you, therefore, to develop an attitude that says, "The best way to change my partner's behavior is to change my own first." In essence, I'm advising you to create an environment in which your partner is most likely to fulfill your needs. If nothing comes of it, at least you'll know you did your part.

**Cognitive Block #9: "I can't and shouldn't act in trust-building ways when I'm so angry."**

There may be times when you're too committed to your anger to be constructive, and you refuse to play the game of forgiveness or reconciliation.

"I don't feel loved or loving, so how can you expect me to act as if I do?" an unfaithful partner asked me. "I can't imagine even taking my wife's hand."

"I'm too mad to even look at my husband, much less work on exercises with him," a hurt partner said.

These defiant attitudes are understandable but counter-productive. They may allow you to feel less vulnerable and exposed, more self-righteously irate, but in the end they deny you the opportunity to test what you and your partner are ca-

pable of creating together. I encourage you, therefore, to step back and ask yourself whether your refusal to do the exercises is a result of *emotional reasoning*—a cognitive error by which you assume that because you feel something strongly, it must be true; that because you're furious at your partner, you must have a right to be.

Since you'll never feel angry without feeling right—it's a basic characteristic of anger—I suggest that you don't waste time debating whether your anger is justified, but ask yourself instead, "Is it useful? How will it serve me?" This may be one of those times when it makes sense not to be true to your feelings, but to act in service of your life together, knowing that more loving feelings may follow once you act in loving ways. As the poet and author Robert Bly said, "We make the path by walking."<sup>6</sup>

**LOOKING AHEAD**

The process of restoring trust can take a lifetime, but this doesn't mean you'll have to struggle with trust issues on a daily basis. Your relationship is likely to feel fragile and tentative for several years after the affair is revealed, but during that time you can expect to experience many reassuring, joyous moments as well.

Trust is a delicate, elusive gift that can be earned only over time, through commitment and continued effort. I ask you to be courageous and make yourself available for change. You may have only one opportunity to engage your partner in the healing process, so I encourage you to seize it, and respond with your most confident self—the self that allows you to address your partner's grievances and act *as if* you believe the two of you are capable of reconnecting more solidly and lovingly than before.

As a patient of mine once said, "You can have trust without intimacy, but you can't have intimacy without trust." With trust comes the knowledge that "I can give myself to you knowing that you won't harm me—that you'll support me and what

matters to me. I can open myself up to love you because I feel safe with you and valued by you." The exercises in this chapter should help you restore this basic sense of security. But you need to learn more—for example, how to communicate more constructively, how to renew sexual intimacy, how to forgive. The rest of this book takes you on this greater journey.

## SEVEN

### How to Talk About What Happened

Many couples make the mistake of thinking they can rebuild their relationship after an affair simply by having enjoyable, positive experiences together. Although good times are critical to healing—you need to make room for playing and relaxing—they're no substitute for talking out your pain and dissatisfaction, and being listened to and understood. Unless you open yourself to your partner's feelings and communicate your own, your positive interactions will be like frosting on a stale cake. Let's turn, then, to the subject of this chapter: how to talk and listen more intimately—how to talk in a way that lets your partner know who you are and what you need, and listen in a way that encourages your partner to be open and vulnerable with you.

*Learning* constructive communication techniques is the easy part (I list several of them at the end of the chapter); being *will-ing to use them* is the challenge. "I know exactly what I should say to my partner to turn the whole argument around," you